

## My Poor Your Poor: Does it Really Matter?

Nechama Goldman Barash

### I. Human Dignity Before All Else

#### Pirkei Avot Chapter 3, Mishneh 14

Rabbi Akiba would also say: Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in the image, as it is says, "For in the image of G-d, He made man" (Genesis 9:6). Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of G-d; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they are called children of G-d, as it is stated: "You are children of the L-rd your G-d" (Deuteronomy 14:1). Beloved are Israel, for they were given a precious article; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they were given a precious article, as it is stated: "I have given you a good purchase; My Torah, do not forsake it" (Proverbs 4:2).

הוא ה'ה אומר, חביב אדם שנברא בצלם. חבה יתרה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם, שנאמר (בראשית ט) (כי בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם. חביבין ישראל שנבראו בנים למקום. חבה יתרה נודעת להם שנבראו בנים למקום, שנאמר) דברים יד (בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם. חביבין ישראל שננתן להם כלי חמדה. חבה יתרה נודעת להם שננתן להם כלי חמדה שבו נברא העולם, שנאמר) משלי ד (כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם, תורתי אל תעזבו:

#### Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: Parshat Re'eh: Tzedaka: The Untranslatable Value

Protecting dignity and avoiding humiliation was a systematic element of rabbinical law. So, for example, the rabbis ruled that even the richest should be buried plainly so as not to shame the poor. On certain festive days girls, especially those from wealthy families, had to wear borrowed clothes, 'so as not to shame those who do not have.' The rabbis intervened to lower the prices of religious necessities so that no one would be excluded from communal celebrations. Work conditions had to be such that employees were treated with basic respect. Here, the proof text was G-d's declaration, 'For to Me the children of Israel are servants' – meaning that they were not to be treated as servants of any human being. Freedom presupposes self-respect, and a free society will therefore be one that robs no one of that basic human entitlement.

#### Directed Questions:

1. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?
2. What might it mean to see that image of God in other human beings different from you?
3. Can you define human dignity or, what the lack of human dignity looks like?

### II. Charity Begins at Home

#### Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Batra 8b

Our Rabbis taught: The charity fund is collected by two persons [jointly] and distributed by three. It is collected by two, because any office conferring authority over the community must be filled by at least two persons. It must be distributed by three, on the analogy of money case [which are tried by a Beth din of three]. Food for the soup kitchen is collected by three and distributed by three, since it is distributed as soon as it is collected. Food is distributed every day, the charity

#### תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף ח עמוד ב

תנו רבנן: קופה של צדקה נגבית בשנים ומתחלקת בשלשה, נגבית בשנים - שאין עושים שירות על הצבור פחות משנים, ומתחלקת בשלשה - כדיני ממונות; תמחוי נגבית בשלשה ומתחלקת בשלשה, שגבויה וחלוקה שוים; תמחוי - בכל יום, קופה - מערב שבת לערב שבת, תמחוי - לעניי עולם, קופה - לעניי העיר; ורשאים בני העיר לעשות קופה תמחוי ותמחוי קופה, ולשנותה לכל מה שירצו; ורשאים בני העיר להתנות על המדות ועל השערים, ועל שכר פועלים, ולהסיע על קיצתו. אמר

<p>fund every Friday. The soup kitchen is for all comers, the charity fund for the poor of the town only. The townspeople are also at liberty to fix weights and measures, prices and wages, and to inflict penalties for infringement on their rules.</p>	<p>מר: אין עושין שררות על הצבור פחות משנים. מנא הני מילי? אמר רב נחמן, אמר קרא: +שמות כ"ח+ והם יקחו את הזהב וגו'. שררות הוא דלא עבדי, הא הימוני מהימן, מסייע ליה לרבי חנינא, דאמר רבי חנינא: מעשה ומינה רבי שני אחין על הקופה. מאי שררותא? דאמר רב נחמן אמר רבה בר אבוב: לפי שממשיכין על הצדקה ואפילו בע"ש. איני? והא כתיב: +ירמיהו ל"א+ ופקדתי על כל לוחציו, ואמר ר' יצחק בר שמואל בר מרתא משמיה דרב: ואפי' על גבאי צדקה! לא קשיא: הא דאמיד, הא דלא אמיד! <b>כי הא דרבא אכפיה לרב נתן בר אמי, ושקיל מיניה ארבע מאה זוזי לצדקה.</b></p>
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<p><a href="#">Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor.9.12</a> A person who dwells in a city for thirty days is forced to give tzedakah to the Kupah (community fund that feeds the resident poor with a weekly food allocation) with the rest of the residents of the city. If he dwelt there three months they force him to give to the Tamhui (public soup kitchen for any hungry person). If he dwelt there six months they force him to give tzedakah for clothing to clothe the poor. If he dwelt there nine months they force him to give tzedakah for the burial fund which provides all the burial requirements for the poor.</p>	<p>משנה תורה, מתנות לאביונים ט:יב מי שישב במדינה שלשים יום כופין אותו ליתן צדקה לקופה עם בני המדינה, ישב שם שלשה חדשים כופין אותו ליתן התמחוי, ישב שם ששה חדשים כופין אותו ליתן צדקה בכסות שמכסים בה עניי העיר, ישב שם תשעה חדשים כופין אותו ליתן צדקה לקבורה שקוברין בה את העניים ועושין להם כל צרכי קבורה.</p>
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1. What is the difference between a soup kitchen and charity fund in terms of communal resources? Why?
2. Should we as a society be able to force people of means to give charity? What might that look like if we could?
3. Why does the Talmud need to give guidelines as to who collects and gives out charity? What are some of the parallels today?

<p><b>Bava Metzia 71a</b> (Exodus 22:24) "If you lend my people money, even the poor with you..." My people and strangers, my people have precedence, a poor person and a rich one, the poor have precedence. Your poor and the poor of your city, your poor have precedence, the poor of your city and the poor of another city, the poor of your city have precedence. The Master says, "Is it not obvious that your people come first?" Rabbi Nahman answers: Huna told me it means even if the money is being lent to a stranger with interest and to an Israelite without [the latter should take precedence].</p>	<p><b>תלמוד בבלי, בבא מציעא, דף עא עמוד א</b> דתני רב יוסף: "אם כסף תלוה את עמי את העני עמך" (שמות כ"ב), עמי ונכרי - עמי קודם, עני ועשיר - עני קודם, ענייך ועניי עירך - ענייך קודמין, עניי עירך ועניי עיר אחרת - עניי עירך קודמין.</p>
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<p><b>Aruch Hashulchan: Yoreh Deah 251</b> "Even the richest individual is surrounded by so many needy family members, that there will be nothing left to give to the desperately poor in a distant city...How can the law allow for the distant poor to die of hunger? Therefore, it appears to me that we must make sure to</p>	<p><b>ערוך השולחן יורה דעה סימן רנא</b> וחלק גדול מהצדקה יתן לקרוביו ועניי עירו ומעט מחוייב ליתן גם לרחוקים ועניי עיר אחרת דאל"כ עיר של עניים יגועו ברעב ח"ו אלא וודאי כמ"ש ותדע לך שכן הוא דאל"כ איזה גבול תתן לפרנסתו שהיא קודמת וכל אחד יאמר אני נצרך לפרנסתי כל מה שאני מרויח שהרי אין גבול להוצאה כידוע אלא וודאי כמ"ש</p>
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give to even the very distant poor, however those closest to you should continue to receive more than those further away."	דלא קאי רק על מי שיש לו רק לחם מצומצם להחיות נפשו ונפש אשתו ובניו ובנותיו הקטנים :
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1. How do we choose who to give donations to?
2. Does it make sense to give preference to "your poor" when there are so many poor and suffering around the world?
3. How does the Aruch Hashulchan address this?

### III. My Poor, Your Poor???

<b>Exodus 23:9</b> And a stranger shall you not oppress; for you know the heart of a stranger, seeing you were strangers in the land of Egypt	<b>שמות כג:</b> וגר לא תלחץ ואתם ידעתם את נפש הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים.
<b>Leviticus 24:22</b> You shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger as for the home born, for I am the Lord your God	<b>ויקרא כד:</b> משפט אחד יהיה לכם כגר כאזרח יהיה כי אני ה' אלקכם.

#### אור החיים שמות פרק כב פסוק כ

(ב) וגר לא תונה וגו' כי גרים וגו'. רש"י ז"ל פירש אף הוא יכול להנותך כי גרים וגו', ור"א פי' זכור כי הייתם כמותו, ורמב"ן דחה ב' הדרכים ופי' כי תדעו שאשמע צעקת דלים כאשר שמע צעקתך וגו' ונראה לו' על פי הקדמה הידועה כי נשמות בני ישראל הם שורש הקדושה בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב חבל נחלתו יתברך וכל זולתם הם חלק רע, ולזה לא יקפידו בזלזול אדם שאינו מהם ובאונאתו לצד שיחשבוהו שפחות הוא מהדרגות הקדושה ומה יולד ענפי האונאה, לזה כאשר צוה עליהם לבל יזנום ולא ילחצו אמר הטעם שאני מצוץ לבל תונה שאין לך לומר שהוא בחינת שורש הרע או כיון שהוא מוטבע בבחינת הקליפה הרי נגרע מערכך כי אתם גרים הייתם במצרים פירוש על דרך מה שפירשתי (ויגש מו ג) כי לגוי גדול אשימך שם ובפסוק (כ' ב') אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים בפרשת יתרו שנשמות ישראל עצמם היו טבועות בקליפה ואם כן יהיה גר זה כאחד מכם באין הבדל ולזה לא תונה ולא תלחצנו:

#### Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"Hatred of the foreigner is the oldest of passions, going back to tribalism and the prehistory of civilisation. The pages of history are stained with blood spilled in the name of racial or ethnic conflict. Dislike of the unlike is as old as mankind....The Torah asks, why should you not hate the stranger? Because you once stood where he stands now. You know the heart of the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt. If you are human, so is he. If he is less than human, so are you."

<b>Jerusalem Talmud Gittin Chapter 5, Halacha 9, 33a</b> It was taught: A city in which there are non Jews and Jews, you appoint collectors from the non Jews and collectors from the Jews and you collect from non Jews and Jews in order to support the poor non Jews and Jews of the city and one visits the sick non Jews and the sick Jews and we bury the dead non Jews and the dead Jews and we comfort the non Jewish mourners and the Jewish mourners and we launder the clothing of the non Jews and clothing of the Jews because of the ways of peace.	<b>תלמוד ירושלמי, גיטין, פרק ה הלכה ט, לג ע"א:</b> תני עיר שיש בה גוים וישראל מעמידין גבאי גוים וגבאי ישראל וגובין משל גוים ומשל ישראל ומפרנסין עניי גוים ועניי ישראל ומבקרין חולי גוים וחולי ישראל וקוברין מתי גוים ומתי ישראל ומנחמין אבילי גוים ואבילי ישראל ומכבסין כלי גוים וכלי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום.
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<b>Gittin 61a</b>	גיטין סא.
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<p>The mishna teaches: <b>One does not protest against poor gentiles</b> who come to take <b>gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and the produce in the corner of the field, which is given to the poor [pe'at]</b>, although they are meant exclusively for the Jewish poor, <b>on account of the ways of peace.</b></p> <p>Similarly, <b>the Sages taught in a baraita (Tosefta 5:4): One sustains poor gentiles along with poor Jews, and one visits sick gentiles along with sick Jews, and one buries dead gentiles along with dead Jews.</b> All this is done <b>on account of the ways of peace</b>, to foster peaceful relations between Jews and gentiles.</p>	<p>אין ממחין ביד עניי נכרים בלקט בשכחה ובפאה מפני דרכי שלום: ת"ר מפרנסים עניי נכרים עם עניי ישראל ומבקרים חולי נכרים עם חולי ישראל וקוברין מתי נכרים עם מתי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום:</p>
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<p><b>Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor, 7:7</b> We provide and shelter the poor of the gentiles together with the poor of Israel because of the ways of peace.</p>	<p>רמב"ם, משנה תורה, הלכות מתנות עניים, פרק ז הלכה ז: מפרנסין ומכסין עניי גוים עם עניי ישראל, מפני דרכי שלום.</p>
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<p><b>Aruch Hashulchan Yoreh Death 251:13</b> One gives to anyone who puts out his hand for bread and even if an idolator comes to ask for bread, one gives him and thus the sages said that we provide for the gentile poor together with the Jewish poor because of the ways of peace. And not necessarily with the Jewish destitute but even if they come alone to take charity, we give him</p>	<p><b>ערוך השולחן יורה דעה סימן רנא</b> סעיף יג כל הפושט יד ליטול לחם נותנין לו ואפילו בא עובד כוכבים לבקש לחם נותנין לו וכך אמרו חכמים מפרנסים עניי עכו"ם עם עניי ישראל מפני דרכי שלום ולא דווקא עם עניי ישראל דאפילו בא לבדו ליטול נותנין לו שאינו רוצה בהיתר כלל וזהו וודאי להכעיס וזה לא שכיח כלל וד' ירחם]</p>
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1. The Talmud uses the language of “ways of peace” to explain why we are responsible for ensuring that the poor, sick and dead of non-Jews are cared for.
2. How do you understand that language? What might these sources be trying to address or inspire in its readers?
3. Why is it difficult for us to care deeply for those outside of our communities/families/orbits?

<p><b><u>Kohelet Rabba (Vilna) Chapter 11 (courtesy of Rabbi Meesh Hammar Kossoy)</u></b></p> <p>Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua was walking on the rocks by the sea, when he saw a ship being tossed about in the water and in the blink of an eye, sink together with all on board. He noticed a man sitting on a plank of the ship [carried] from wave to wave until he was carried ashore naked. He hid himself among the rocks by the sea.</p> <p>It happened to be the season of the Israelite pilgrimage ascent to Jerusalem. He said to them, ‘I belong to the descendants of Esau, your brother; give me a little clothing wherewith to cover my nakedness because the sea stripped me bare and nothing was saved with me.’</p> <p>They retorted, ‘So may all your people be stripped bare!’</p> <p>He raised his eyes and saw Rabbi Eleazar who was walking among them; he exclaimed, ‘I observe that you are an old and respected man of your people, and you know the dignity due to your fellow-creatures. Favor me, and give me a garment wherewith to cover my nakedness because the sea stripped me bare.’</p> <p>Rabbi Eleazar ben. Shammua was wearing seven robes; he took one off and gave it to him. He led him to his house, provided him with food and drink, gave him two hundred dinars, drove him fourteen Persian miles, and treated him with great honor until he brought him to his home.</p>
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Sometime later the wicked emperor died, and they appointed this man king in his stead, and he decreed concerning that province that all the men were to be killed and all the women taken as spoil. They said to Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua, 'Go and intercede for us.' He told them 'You know that this government does nothing without being paid.' They said to him, 'Here are four thousand dinars; take them and go and intercede for us.'

He took them and went and stood by the gate of the royal palace. He said to [the guards], 'Go, tell the king that a Jew is standing at the gate, and wishes to greet the king.' The king ordered him to be brought in. On beholding him, the king descended from his throne and prostrated himself before him. He asked him, 'What is my master's business here, and why has my master troubled to come here?' He replied, 'That you should have mercy upon this province and annul this decree.'

The king asked him, 'Is there any falsehood written in the Torah?' 'No,' was the reply; and he said to him, 'Is it not written in your Torah, "An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord.." (Deut. XXIII, 4)? What is the reason? "Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way (ib. 5)". It is also written, "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother (ib. 8);" and am I not a descendant of Esau, your brother, but they did not treat me with kindness! And whoever transgresses the Torah incurs the penalty of death.'

Rabbi Eleazar ben Shammua replied to him, 'Although they are guilty towards you, forgive them and have mercy upon them.' He said to him, 'You know that this government does thing without being paid.' He told him, 'I have with me four thousand dinars; take them and have mercy upon the people.' He said to him, 'These four thousand dinars are presented to you in exchange for the two hundred which you gave me, and the whole province will be spared for your sake in return for the food and drink with which you provided me. Go also into my treasury and take seventy robes of honor in return for the robe you gave me, and go in peace to your people whom I forgive for your sake.' They applied to him the text, CAST THY BREAD UPON THE WATERS.

1. How does the story illustrate the concept of "ways of peace" that the Talmud encouraged above? What are some of the takeaways?

**Rabbi Yehuda Unterman, from the Jewish Chronicle, Rabbi Natan Levy, "It's Our Duty to Give to Non Jewish Causes"**  
 "Lately it has become customary amongst our teachers to state that there is no real obligation towards bettering the life of non-Jews..." 'wrote Rav Yehuda Unterman, "and there is no need to encourage the community to support non-Jews with tzedakah and kindness, for any such acts are only done for the sake of darchei shalom and thus have no real source in the Torah law. Therefore we must define the true concept of darchei shalom. It is not just a means to keep Judaism safe from non-Jewish hatred, but flows from the core ethical teachings of the Torah." (Shevet M'Yehuda, 70).

**שבט מיהודה חלק ג' סימן ע' (הרב אונטרמן)**

בזמן האחרון נשמעו לדאבוננו דברי חתירה תחת ערכי המוסר של היהדות התורתית ובמיוחד נגד השקפת התורה על גוי ואדם, שכאילו אין יחס ראוי מצד ההלכה לנכרים. כאשר הראו להמבקרים שאין בדבריהם כל ממש והבקורת מפורכת מעיקרה ע"י הלכות מפורשות, שנצטוו להתייחס בחיבה אל כל אדם הנברא בצלם ולעזור לו בעניני צדקה וחסד נאחזו המשמיצים בטענה אחת. הם אומרים כי הלכות אלו נקבעו מפני דרכי שלום בלבד ולא משורת הדין הם. יש איפוא צורך לפרש את המובן האמיתי של מושג "דרכי שלום", שאינו בבחינת מידת חסידות ולא כאמצעי להגן על עצמנו, אלא נובע מעצם המוסר של תורה"ק.

**Rabbi JB Soloveitchik - Abraham's Journey**

The universal problems faced by humanity are also faced by the Jew. Famine, disease, war, oppression, materialism, atheism, permissiveness, pollution of the environment – all of these are problems which history has imposed not only on the general community but also on the covenantal community. We have no right to tell mankind that these

problems are exclusively theirs. God has charged man with the task of fighting evil, of subduing the destructive forces of nature and transforming them into constructive forces. **The Jew is a member of humanity.** God's command to "be fruitful and multiply; fill the land and conquer it, dominate the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every beast that walks the land" (Gen. 1:28) is addressed equally to non-Jew and Jew. **As human beings, Jews are duty bound to contribute to the general welfare regardless of the treatment accorded them by society** (p. 203).

**Posted by Rabbi Ari Hart on Facebook May 23, 2022:**

We did it!

1.9 million dollars of medical debt held by Illinois residents in need - released.

Shmitta year values - made real.

Partnerships - deepened and strengthened.

As part of our ongoing partnership between [Bright Star Church](#), [St. James Ministries Chicago](#) [COGIC](#), [Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob](#) and [Solu: Make an Impact!](#), two Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) churches on the south Side and an orthodox synagogue and community in Skokie and the North Side, we came together to eliminate nearly 2 million dollars of medical debt, in partnership with RIP Medical Debt.

We were inspired by our shared scriptures that call us to spend 1 year out of every 7 years working on eliminating harmful debt. In Hebrew, this is called the shmittah year - the year of release, and this campaign was conducted during this shmittah year, 5782 or September 2021-September 2022.

We eliminated debt for 2,327 individuals and families....May the Shmitta year be a source of release for millions of Americans trapped by medical debt. And for all those suffering under heavy burdens - physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, may you find Shmitta year release and rest. Amen!

1. How does the action taken by Rabbi Ari Hart and the pastors he worked with reflect the values of charity, human dignity and my poor your poor we have been learning about in the sources?
2. Can you think of similar initiatives you have heard of in your area?